

Happenings at Hope

January–February

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From the Pastor

Dear members and friends of Hope Lutheran Church. It has almost been a whole year since Marta, John, and I came to Utah and I was installed as your pastor. This has been a year of great blessings for my family. Of course, one of these blessings arrived quite recently. Our daughter, Helen Ruth Webber, was born on Saturday night, December 20th. It was a great privilege for me to Baptize my own daughter during the Christmas Festival Service.

But Helen has not been our only blessing. Our son, John, has grown quite accustomed to this congregation and it's especially its people. He loves it that confirmation class usually meets at our home, because it means that his friends have come over to play (he doesn't yet understand “work”). And of course, far be it from me to not mention that whenever Marta plays the organ, John smells distinctly of the perfume of whoever watched him during the service.

And last, but certainly not least, you have been a blessings—all the members of Hope Lutheran Church. You could not have been more welcoming and generous to us as we adjusted to life as a pastor's family. It has been a privilege of getting to know all of you personally, and to be able to serve you with God's Word and the Sacraments.

May God bless you and your families in the new year, and may He bless all of us together as members of Hope Lutheran Church. We do not know what God has in store for us, individually or as a group, in the coming year. What we do know is that God has a plan for us, and that it is one which is set on our ultimate good and spiritual well-being.

In Christ,

Rev. Paul Webber

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The Significance of Epiphany

The 3 wise men didn't visit Jesus and His parents right after Jesus was born. Even though nearly every nativity you will ever see includes the 3 wise men, they didn't arrive with their gifts to worship their infant Lord until Jesus was more of a toddler—around 2 years old. We see this in the 2nd chapter of Luke's Gospel:

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled . . . Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him."

After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

Part of wisdom is knowing what you don't know, and knowing your own shortcomings. The 3 wise men were wise, but they didn't think that this wisdom meant that they knew everything, or that it meant that they didn't need the one, true, God. They had access to, and searched, the Scriptures, where they learned of God's promise to send the Messiah. When the wise men learned where they could find Him they made the long journey from their homeland (probably modern-day Iran) to Israel to see Him.

Interesting as this account is, it was not an other insignificant visit from 3, somewhat random, travelers. The wise men were wise gentiles. Even though they had access to and knew the Old Testament Scriptures, they were not of the people of Israel to whom God had promised the Messiah. But, they came anyway, because they had learned from the Scriptures that Jesus wasn't just for the Hebrews. Jesus was for all people.

It is for this reason that Epiphany is a significant day in the Church year. Epiphany is the day where we especially celebrate that Jesus wasn't just given for the glory of God's people, Israel. He was also made incarnate to be a light for the revelation (and salvation) of all the gentile nations—even people living in Utah!

It is not an isolated even that the 3 wise men searched the Scriptures and then sought their Savior.



Ever since then, wise men and women have continued to seek their Lord. This seeking, though, is not an open-ended, unsure, quest. It is true that we do not find Christ in every little thing in this sinful world in which we live. We do have to look for him a little bit. But, we know exactly where we have to look in order to find Him.

We have God's sure promise throughout the Old and New Testaments that we find our savior in the Gospel. When we read the Bible, we are reading of the Christ whom God sent into our world to earn the forgiveness for all people. This is why, in the Bible, Jesus is so often spoken of as the light of the world. Through faith in Him as our savior, we are made able to see God as He really is, our loving, forgiving, Father. Without Christ, we would all be in the dark, ignorant of God's love and only aware of the sadness of sin and death. The visit of the 3 wise men is illustrative of the blessed fact that Jesus came to save us, and that we have the privilege and ability to seek Him in our lives of faith.

Let us bow before the Lord and confess our sins

If you page through the various orders of service in the Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary, something which you will find at, or very near, the beginning of every service is confession and absolution.

The reason why we confess our sins right away in every single service, and then receive God's absolution, is because we need to be forgiven of our sins in order to be fit to approach God and receive His blessings in the Word and Sacraments. This "fitness," or preparation, has to do both with how God views us and with how we view ourselves. We read in 1 John 1:8-9:

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

We need to be forgiven of our sins right away in the divine service so that, in God's sight, we are fit to come into God's presence in the Word and Sacraments. To not do so would be like going over to the White House for dinner and showing up in dirty workout clothes. We also need to confess our sins to

be reminded of why we need what God gives us in the Word and Sacraments. We are sinners. In and of ourselves we do not possess all that we need for this life and the next. As sinners we need to be forgiven by God, and we must rely on Him for the spiritual strength to live, as Christians, in this unchristian world.

This doesn't just apply to those who attend services in God's house. It also applies to those who have been called to conduct services in God's house. This is why, during the service, I do not enter the altar area of the sanctuary before we have confessed

our sins to God and received his Absolution. Instead, I remain with the congregation outside the altar area until I, with the congregation, have been forgiven and cleansed of my sins. Only after this has taken place am I fit to enter the altar area and conduct the rest of the service.

It possible that visitors to our services will be surprised, and maybe even a little put off, by our congregation's initial focus on sin. They may even be offended that we expect them to confess that they are sinful right away when they attend one of our services. In most churches, sin is something which is downplayed, not brought front and center.

It is for this reason that it is important that you, the members of Hope Lutheran Church, understand the flow of, and logic behind, the historic divine service. The reasons why we worship as we do are not some secret knowledge which we want to keep to ourselves. We have a great chance to make a simple explanation of God's Law and Gospel when we explain to others why it is important for us to confess our sins and receive God's absolution. If people are shown from the Bible why it is important for us to do this, then even if they aren't used to it, at least they will

see that confession and absolution is beneficial, if not entirely necessary.

To this end, you will now find cards in the hymnal racks which explain the liturgy. These are something which can be a great help for visitors, showing that the historic liturgy really isn't a random smattering of old-fashioned Christian songs. But they can be a good thing for us too, because it is never a bad thing to be reminded of the theological depth and significance of the way in which we worship the Lord.



You may have already won \$10,000,000...or maybe not

You may have just won a new car! . . .

But don't sell the old one just yet.

You may already be a finalist in a contest for an all-expense paid vacation to Aruba! . . .

But please, don't start packing.

I remember the story of a woman who, some time ago, believed what she received in the mail. It was telling her that she was already a WINNER!

She instantly saw dollar signs -- millions coming her way! She bought all kinds of expensive things, believing she just struck it rich. Later she found out: they tell everybody they're Already a Winner. She found herself deep in debt and facing an uncertain future.

The world's wisdom says: "If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is." "There's no such thing as getting something for nothing." Yet, when it comes to spiritual things, the world's wisdom is: You're already sitting on a gold mine! You have spiritual wisdom and potential within! They tell us this, even though our world is plunged into death, darkness, confusion, and sin.

Life, Light, Truth, and Grace, on the other hand, are in Jesus Christ. There are no terrible open-ended "ifs" with Him: "You may have already won ten million dollars, IF . . ." "You may be blessed for life with God, IF . . ." No!

Our sins have been paid for by the blood and death of Jesus! It was our sin He carried, and our death He died. So then, He Himself is our worthiness in God's sight. It's guaranteed by

His resurrection from the dead.

Without Him, we die -- lost forever in darkness. But whoever believes in Him is not condemned -- he has eternal life.

It's not something for nothing. There was a price paid. At the same time, it's not hanging by any terrible "Ifs." Jesus has paid the price, to give us the gift. That's what comes to us, packaged in preaching and Sunday worship. Please join us! See you Sunday!

- This article is a production of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod board for Home Outreach
- More information about our synod can be found at its web page; evangelicallutheralsynod.org



Mercy with Thankfulness

Some have a gift for being merciful. When a person wants to talk, they're the ones who patiently take the time to listen. When someone needs help finishing a project for work or school, they're the ones who gladly step up to lend a hand. When a friend shows up on their doorstep, they will not turn that friend away. Even if the need goes beyond their ability to render aid, they do what they can, showing that person where to find help. We all know someone like that. Maybe you are that merciful person.

It's easy to have mercy on those who understand the depth of the sacrifice being made for them. In fact, it's downright pleasurable to deal mercifully with those who you know will thank you later. Yet there are times when mercy is not so easy. Perhaps in the past, mercy that was shown went unnoticed. Maybe someone took advantage of you and the mercy you offered. We might still help such a person, but that help does not come with much willingness or cheer.

Is that kind of help truly merciful? Mercy is more than helping people who are in desperate circumstances. Mercy is the "kind or forgiving treatment of someone who could be treated harshly" (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mercy>). True mercy is help for people who do not deserve it.

That was the mercy God gave to us. We were born dead in sin, doomed to an eternity of hellfire. Yet the Lord had mercy. He sent His Son Jesus into this world to suffer hell in our place at the cross so that we could live with Him forever in

heaven. Jesus willingly carried out His Father's plan. As sinners, we did not deserve God's help, yet God's mercy in Christ can be seen in that "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8, NKJV).



Your mercy has not been perfect, and how often have we forgotten to thank God for His mercy? Yet by the saving mercy of Christ, you are forgiven. And His mercy now fuels your own mercy. By the mercies of God in Christ, you can offer love and help to those who don't deserve it, kindly assisting those who have abused your help in the past (perhaps with a bit more wisdom this time). You can happily forgive those who have hurt you.

It will not be easy. In fact, without Christ, that kind of mercy is impossible, but with Christ all things are possible. With His good news beating in your heart, you can show real mercy, "mercy, with cheerfulness" (Romans 12:8, NKJV).

Rev. S. Piet Van Kampen, ELS Board for Christian Service

Congregational News

It was announced at the recent congregational forum that in this issue of the newsletter, different options for the sale of land would be presented. It has been decided jointly by the Pastor and the Executive Committee to table this issue for further study. The congregation will be informed if there is more information available, or input needed, in the coming weeks and months.

At this same meeting, the 2015 budget was discussed and passed. This budget is not included in this newsletter, but anyone who desires to have a copy of it for themselves may have one. Just ask Pastor Webber.

January-February Birthdays

1-15, Marta Webber
1-17, Jeffery Olsen
2-3, McCoy Curtis
2-7, John Webber
2-15, Fetiva Lujan
2-25, Grace Hoffman



We'd love to announce your birthday. If you haven't done so already, please let Pastor Webber know when it is

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